

## Message Text

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51

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 IO-10 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3366

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, BE

SUBJECT: TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IN TROUBLE OVER LINGUISTIC ISSUE

REF: BRUSSELS AIRGRAM A-42 DATED MARCH 3, 1975

SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS RETURNS FROM DUBLIN TO ROUND OF URGENT NEGOTIATIONS TO SAVE HIS GOVERNMENT FROM COLLAPSE OVER DOMESTIC LINGUISTIC ISSUE. MILITANT FLEMISH INTERESTS ARE ATTEMPTING TO DRIVE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT, WHICH REPRESENTS BOTH FLEMISH AND FRANCOPHONE INTEREST INTO EITHER-OR POSITION ON ONE SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC CONTROVERSY. TINDEMANS' STRATEGY IS TO SHUNT ISSUE FROM POLITICAL ARENA TO LEGAL FIELD WHERE AT LEAST TIME WOULD BE GAINED FOR CONCILIATION AND MANEUVER. END SUMMARY.

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. PRIMIN TINDEMANS, JUST BACK FROM DUBLIN SUMMIT , ENTERED

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ROUND OF URGENT TALKS THIS MORNING IN EFFORT TO

SAVE HIS SERIOUSLY-THREATENED GOVERNMENT. ISSUE IS A POLARIZATION OF OPINION OVER SCHAERBEEK COMMUNE LINGUISTIC ISSUE. ESSENCE OF DISPUTE IS ACTION OF FRANCOPHONE MAYOR OF THIS BRUSSELS COMMUNE (BOROUGH) TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DUTCH-AND FRENCH-SPEAKING CITIZENS BY INSTITUTING SYSTEM OF LANGUAGE-DESIGNATED WINDOWS IN TOWN HALL. (SEE REFAIRGRAM FOR DETAILS).

2. LAST WEEK MILITANT FLEMISH OPPOSITION PARTY VOLKSUNIE INTRODUCED RESOLUTION IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DEMANDING HOUSE DECLARE SCHAERBEEK MAYOR'S ACTION ILLEGAL. BY VOTE OF 90-49 WITH 50 ABSTENTIONS, VOLKSUNIE PROCEDURAL RESOLUTION REFERRING DEMAND TO INTERIOR COMMITTEE FOR URGENT CONSIDERATION WAS PASSED MARCH 6. VOTE CUT ACROSS PARTY LINES, RANGING FLEMINGS AGAINST FRANCOPHONES. ABSTAINERS WERE MOST SOCIALISTS--THE PARTY IS TRYING TO STAY ABOVE THE BATTLE--AND MINISTERS AND STATE SECRETARIES OF TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT. TINDEMANS STRATEGY IS TO TRY TO SHOVE THE DISPUTE INTO LEGAL OR QUASI-LEGAL CHANNELS, KEEPING IT OFF FLOOR OF HOUSE WHERE HIS GOVERNMENT'S LIFE IS AT STAKE.

3. THE INSTITUTIONS AT HAND ARE THE LINGUISTIC COMMISSION, A STATUTORY BODY ESTABLISHED TO IRON OUT LANGUAGE DISPUTES BY CONCILIATION AND AGREED INTERPRETATIONS OF LEGISLATION AND PRECEDENTS, AND THE COUNCIL OF STATE, A QUASI-JUDICIAL BODY WHICH DELIVERS OPINIONS ON ISSUES WHICH ARE NOT PURELY LEGAL OR PURELY POLITICAL. PURPOSE OF TINDEMANS' TALKS TODAY IS REPORTEDLY TO HAVE MEMBERS OF HIS SLIM MAJORITY AGREE THAT SCHAERBEEK ISSUE BE LAID BEFORE COUNCIL OF STATE, THUS MAKING SHOWDOWN IN PARLIAMENT UNNECESSARY NOW.

4. FRANCOPHONE WING OF TINDEMANS' SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC) CAUCUSED LAST NIGHT AND AGREED TO SUPPORT PRIMIN'S EFFORT TO AVERT GOVERNMENT CRISIS. TINDEMANS MET WITH FRANCOIS PERIN, LEADER OF COALITION PARTNER, THE WALLOON RALLY, THIS MORNING IN EFFORT TO LINE UP SUPPORT FROM HIS MILITANT FRANCOPHONES. PRIMIN IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SCHEDULED TO MAKE STATEMENT IN HOUSE THURSDAY WHICH WILL REFLECT OUTCOME OF THIS AND PROBABLY FURTHER PATCHING-UP EFFORTS. END UNCLASSIFIED.

COMMENT: TINDEMANS' CHEF DE CABINET TOLD US THIS MORNING JUST BEFORE TINDEMANS' FIRST APPOINTMENT THAT SITUATION WAS "VERY SERIOUS". ASKED WHETHER HE MEANT TO SAY GOVERNMENT WOULD FALL THIS WEEK, HE SAID NO, AND HE

HAD "GOOD HOPE" THAT TODAY'S TALKS WOULD HEAD OFF SHOW-  
DOWN. HE SAID PSB CONSENSUS LAST NIGHT TO ABATE ITS  
FRANCOPHONE MILITANCY AND ASSIST TINDEMANS TO SURVIVE  
WAS CAUSE FOR OPTIMISM.  
FIRESTONE

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